

News Advisory

From the Rhode Island Judiciary



Municipal judge nominated to Traffic Tribunal

June 5, 2013: Rhode Island Supreme Court Chief Justice Paul A. Suttell this afternoon announced the nomination of Providence Municipal Court Associate Judge Joseph A. Abbate to fill a magistrate vacancy on the Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal. The position carries a 10-year term.

Abbate, a Providence municipal judge since 2002, was among six finalists chosen April 29 by the Magistrate Selection Committee and forwarded to Chief Justice Suttell. Abbate, 61, of Providence, has been an associate judge of the Providence Municipal Court since 2005 and was an associate judge of the Providence Housing Court from 2002 to 2005. Judge Abbate's experience on the Providence Municipal Court includes traffic law. He has been in private law practice since 1991. He is director of law revision for the General Assembly's Joint Committee on Legislative Services.

Chief Justice Suttell pointed to Abbate's judicial experience in Providence Municipal Court as an important factor in the decision to appoint him.

"Judge Abbate's diverse legal experience and administrative skills in government, coupled with his judicial tenure for the past decade, provide him with the essentials to competently perform the duties of a magistrate on the Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal," Chief Justice Suttell said. "Moreover, his experience in presiding over traffic violations will enable him to make a seamless transition to his new responsibilities."

Abbate is a graduate of Providence College and the Suffolk University School of Law.

This appointment will be forwarded to the state Senate for confirmation.

Chief Justice Suttell praised the credentials of all the finalists. "We had six very outstanding candidates and all of the finalists forwarded to me by the Selection Committee are extremely qualified," he said. "Any of them could well serve our citizens as magistrates on the Traffic Tribunal."

The General Assembly in 2007 gave the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court the appointing authority for Traffic Tribunal magistrates. To open the process, Chief Justice Suttell appointed a five-member Magistrate Selection Committee, chaired by attorney Girard R. Visconti, to screen candidates in public. Also serving on the panel were Traffic

Tribunal Chief Magistrate Guglietta; state police Col. Steven G. O'Donnell; attorney Richard S. Humphrey, and D. Faye Sanders, a former member of the Judicial Nominating Commission. The selection committee interviewed 14 candidates in April, and solicited written public comment.

Abbate fills the vacancy created at the end of 2012 by the retirement of Albert R. Ciullo, an associate judge of the Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal and its predecessor courts for 19 years. In 1999, the General Assembly reorganized the court as the Rhode Island Traffic Tribunal. Any judge at that time retained the title of associate judge, but going forward any new judicial officer at the Traffic Tribunal has held the title of magistrate. Such will be the case with Abbate as Judge Ciullo's replacement. The magistrate position comes with a salary of \$139,897.

The Traffic Tribunal is the busiest of Rhode Island's six state courts, handling 97,701 dispositions in 2012, nearly half of the Judiciary's caseload. The Traffic Tribunal has original jurisdiction over civil traffic offenses committed in Rhode Island, including breathalyzer refusals. The Traffic Tribunal also has oversight responsibilities and concurrent jurisdiction with the Municipal Courts for lesser traffic offenses. It was responsible for collecting \$11.6 million in fines in 2012, all of which was turned over to the state treasury. In addition, the Traffic Tribunal last year collected and distributed \$1.7 million in fines to Rhode Island's cities and towns.

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